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A comic detective story in dialect Irish, a 1919 poem, a classic tale of motherhood, and a sci-fi tale with an O. Henry ending. Edited by Matt Pierard, this is a Non-Commercial Creative Commons etext.

JUST LIKE A CAT

The Project Gutenberg eBook, *Mike Flannery On Duty and Off*, by Ellis Parker Butler,

They were doing good work out back of the Westcote express office. The Westcote Land and Improvement Company was ripping the whole top off Seiler's Hill and dumping it into the swampy meadow, and Mike Flannery liked to sit at the back door of the express office, when there was nothing to do, and watch the endless string of waggons dump the soft clay and sand there. Already the swamp was a vast landscape of small hills and valleys of new, soft soil, and soon it would burst into streets and dwellings. That would mean more work, but Flannery did not care; the company had allowed him a helper already, and Flannery had hopes that by the time the swamp was populated Timmy would be of some use. He doubted it, but he had hopes.

The four-thirty-two train had just pulled in, and Timmy had gone across to meet it with his hand-truck, and now he returned. He came lazily, pulling the cart behind him with one hand. He didn't seem to care whether he ever got back to the office. Flannery's quick blood rebelled.

"Is that all th' faster ye can go?" he shouted. "Make haste! Make haste! 'Tis an ixpriss company ye are workin' fer, an' not a cimitery. T' look at ye wan w'u'd think ye was nawthin' but a funeral!"

"Sure I am," said Tommy. "'Tis as ye have said it, Flannery; I'm th' funeral."

Flannery stuck out his under jaw, and his eyes blazed. For nothing at all he would have let Timmy have a fist in the side of the head, but what was the use? There are some folks you can't pound sense into, and Timmy was one of them.

"What have ye got, then?" asked Flannery.

"Nawthin' but th' corpse," said Timmy impudently, and Flannery did do it. He swung his big right hand at the lad, and would have taught him something, but Timmy wasn't there. He had dodged. Flannery ground his teeth, and bent over the hand-truck. The next moment he straightened up and motioned to Timmy, who had stepped back from him, nearly half a block back.

"Come back," he said peacefully. "Come on back. This wan time I'll do nawthin' to ye. Come on back an' lift th' box into th' office. But th' next time--"

Timmy came back, grinning. He took the box off the truck, carried it into the office, and set it on the floor. It was not a large box, nor heavy, just a small box with strips nailed across the top, and there was

an Angora cat in it. It was a fine, large Angora cat, but it was dead.

Flannery looked at the tag that was nailed on the side of the box. "Ye'd betther git th' waggon, Timmy," he said slowly, "an' proceed with th' funeral up t' Missus Warman's. This be no weather for perishable goods t' be lyin' 'round th' office. Quick speed is th' motto av th' Interurban Ixpriss Company whin th' weather is eighty-four in th' shade. An', Timmy," he called as the boy moved toward the door, "make no difficulty sh'u'd she insist on receiptin' fer th' goods as bein' damaged. If nicissary take th' receipt fer 'Wan long-haired cat, damaged.' But make haste. 'Tis in me mind that sh'u'd ye wait too long Missus Warman will not be receivin' th' consignment at all. She's wan av th' particular kind, Timmy."

In half an hour Timmy was back. He came into the office lugging the box, and let it drop on the floor with a thud.

"She won't take no damaged cats," said Timmy shortly.

Mike Flannery laid his pen on his desk with almost painful slowness and precision. Slowly he slid off his chair, and slowly he picked up his cap and put it on his head. He did not say a word. His brow was drawn into deep wrinkles, and his eyes glittered as he walked up to the box with almost supernaturally stately tread and picked it up. His lips were firmly set as he walked out of the office into the hot sun. Timmy watched him silently.

In less than half an hour Mike Flannery came into the office again, quietly, and set the box silently on the floor. Noiselessly he hung up his cap on the nail above the big calendar back of the counter. He sank into his chair and looked for a long while at the blank wall opposite him.

"An' t' think," he said at last, like one still wrapped in a great blanket of surprise, "t' think she didn't swear wan cuss th' whole time! Thim ladies is wonderful folks! I wonder did she say th' same t' ye as she said t' me, Timmy?"

"Sure she did," said Timmy, grinning as usual.

"Will ye think of that, now!" said Flannery with admiration. "'Tis a grand constitution she must be havin', that lady. Twice in wan afternoon! I wonder could she say th' same three times? 'Tis not possible."

He ran his hand across his forehead and sighed, and his eyes fell on the box. It was still where he had put it, but he seemed surprised to see it there. He had no recollection of anything after Mrs. Warman had begun to talk. He picked up his pen again.

"Interurban Express Co., New York," he wrote. "Consiny Mrs. Warman wont reciev cat way bill 23645 Hibbert and Jones consinor cat is--"

He grinned and ran the end of the pen through his stubble of red hair.

"What is th' swell worrd fer dead, Timmy?" he asked. "I'm writin' a letter t' th' swell clerks in New Yorrk that be always guyin' me about me letters, an' I 'll hand thim a swell worrd fer wance."

"Deceased," said Timmy, grinning.

"'Tis not that wan I was thinkin' of," said Flannery, "but that wan will do. 'Tis a high-soundin' worrd, deceased."

He dipped his pen in the ink again.

"--cat is diseased," he wrote. "Pleas give disposal. Mike Flannery."

When the New York office of the Interurban Express Company received Flannery's letter they called up Hibbert & Jones on the telephone. Hibbert & Jones was the big department store, and it was among the Interurban's best customers. When the Interurban could do it a favour it was policy to do so, and the clerk knew that sending a cat back and forth by rail was not the best thing for the cat, especially if the cat was diseased.

"That cat," said the manager of the live-animal department of Hibbert & Jones, "was in good health when it left here, absolutely, so far as we know. If it was not it is none of our business. Mrs. Warman came in and picked the cat out from a dozen or more, and paid for it. It is her cat. It doesn't interest us any more. And another thing: You gave us a receipt for that cat in good order; if it was damaged in transit it is none of our affair, is it?"

"Owner's risk," said the Interurban clerk. "You know we only accept live animals for transportation at owner's risk."

"That lets us out, then," said the Hibbert & Jones clerk. "Mrs. Warman is the owner. Ring off, please."

Westcote is merely a suburb of New York, and mails are frequent, and Mike Flannery found a letter waiting for him when he opened the office the next morning. It was brief. It said:

"Regarding cat, W.B. 23645, this was sent at owner's risk, and Mrs. Warman seems to be the owner. Cat should be delivered to her. We are writing her from this office, but in case she does not call for it immediately, you will keep it carefully in your office. You had better have a veterinary look at the cat. Feed it regularly."

Mike Flannery folded the letter slowly and looked down at the cat. "Feed it!" he exclaimed. "I wonder, now, was that a misprint fer fumigate it, fer that is what it will be wantin' mighty soon, if I know anything about deceased cats. I wonder do thim dudes in New Yorrk be thinkin, th' long-haired cat is only fainted, mebbby? Do they think they see Mike Flannery sittin' be th' bedside av th' cat, fannin' it t' bring it back t' consciousness? Feed it! Niver in me life have I made a specialty av cats, long-haired or short-haired, an' I do not be pretindin' t' be a profissor av cats, but 'tis me sittled belief that whin a cat is as dead as that wan is it stops eatin'."

He looked resentfully at the cat in the box.

"I wonder sh'u'd I put th' late laminted out on th' back porrch till th' veterinary comes t' take its pulse? I wonder what th' ixpriss company wants a veterinary t' butt into th' thing fer annyhow? Is it th' custom nowadays t' require a certificate av health fer every cat that 's as dead as that wan is before th' funeral comes off? Sure, I do believe th' ixpriss company has doubts av Mike Flannery's ability t' tell is a cat dead or no. Mebbby 'tis thrue. Mebbby so. But wan thing I'm dang sure av, an' that is that sh'u'd the weather not turrrn off t' a cold wave by to-morry mornin' 't will take no coroner t' know th' cat is dead."

He opened the letter again and reread it. As he did so the scowl on his face increased. He held up the letter and slapped it with the back of his hand.

"Kape it carefully in your office," he read with scorn. "Sure! An' what about Flannery? Does th' man think I'm t' sit side be side with th' dead pussy cat an' thry t' work up me imagination t' thinkin' I'm sittin' in a garden av tuberoses? 'Tis well enough t' say kape it, but cats like thim does not kape very well. Th' less said about th' way they kapes th' better."

[Illustration: " _ 'Tis well enough t' say kape it, but cats like thim does not kape very well _ "]

Timmy entered the office, and as he passed the box he sniffed the air in a manner that at once roused Flannery's temper.

"Sthop that!" he shouted. "I'll have none av yer foolin' t'-day. What fer are ye puckerin' up yer nose at th' cat fer? There's nawthin' th' matther with th' cat. 'Tis as sound as a shillin', an' there 's no call fer ye t' be sniffin' 'round, Timmy, me lad! Go about yer worrk, an' lave th' cat alone. 'Twill kape--'twill kape a long time yet. Don't be so previous, me lad. If ye want t' sniff, there 'll be plinty av time by an' by. Plinty av it."

"Ye ain't goin' t' keep th' cat, are ye?" asked Timmy with surprise.

"Let be," said Flannery softly, with a gentle downward motion of his hands. "Let be. If 'tis me opinion 't w'u'd be best t' kape th' cat fer some time, I will kape it. Mike Flannery is th' ixpriss agint av this office, Tim, me bye, an' sh'u'd he be thinkin' 't w'u'd be best fer th' intherists av th' company t' kape a cat that is no longer livin', he will. There be manny things fer ye t' learn, Timmy, before ye know th' whole av th' ixpriss business, an' dead cats is wan av thim."

"G'wan!" said Timmy with a long-drawn vowel. "I know a dead cat when I see one, now."

"Mebby," said Flannery shortly. "Mebby. An' mebbly not. But do ye know where Doc Pomeroy hangs out? Go an' fetch him."

As Timmy passed the box on the way out he looked at the cat with renewed interest. He began to have a slight doubt that he might not know a dead cat when he saw one, after all, if Flannery was going to have a veterinary come to look at it. But the cat certainly looked dead--extremely dead.

Doc Pomeroy was a tall, lank man with a slouch in his shoulders and a sad, hollow-chested voice. His voice was the deepest and mournfullest bass. "The boy says you want me to look at a cat," he said in his hopeless tone. "Where's the cat?"

Flannery walked to the box and stood over it, and Doc Pomeroy stood at the other side. He did not even bend down to look at the cat.

"That cat's dead," he said without emotion.

"Av course it is," said Flannery. "'Twas dead th' firrst time I seen it."

"The boy said you wanted me to look at a cat," said Doc Pomeroy.

"Sure!" said Flannery. "Sure I did! That's th' cat. I wanted ye t' see th' cat. What might be yer opinion av it?"

"What do you want me to do with the cat?" asked Doc Pomeroy.

"Look at it," said Flannery pleasantly. "Nawthin' but look at it. Thim is me orders. 'Have a veterinary look at th' cat,' is what they says. An' I can see be th' look on ye that 'tis yer opinion 'tis a mighty dead cat."

"That cat," said the veterinary slowly, "is as dead as it can be. A cat can't be any deader than that one is."

"It cannot," said Flannery positively. "But it can be longer dead."

"If I had a cat that had been dead longer than that cat has been dead," said Doc Pomeroy as he moved away, "I wouldn't have to see it to know that it was dead. A cat that has been dead longer than that cat has been dead lets you know it. That cat will let you know it pretty quick, now."

"Thank ye," said Flannery. "An' ye have had a good look at it? Ye w'u'dn't like t' look at it again, mebbey? Thim is me orders, t'allow ixamination be th' veterinary, an' if 't w'u'd be anny comfort t' ye I will draw up a chair so ye can look all ye want to."

The veterinary raised his sad eyes to Flannery's face and let them rest there a moment. "Much obliged," he said, but he did not look at the cat again. He went back to his headquarters.

That afternoon Flannery and Timmy began walking quickly when they passed the box, and toward evening, when Flannery had to make out his reports, he went out on the back porch and wrote them, using a chair-seat for a desk. One of his tasks was to write a letter to the New York office.

"W.B. 23645," he wrote, "the vetinnary has seen the cat, and its diseased all right. he says so. no sine of Mrs. Warman yet but ile keep the cat in the offis if you say so as long as i cann stand it. but how cann i feed a diseased cat. i never fed a diseased cat yet. what do you feed cats lik that."

The next morning when Flannery reached the office he opened the front door, and immediately closed it with a bang and locked it. Timmy was late, as usual. Flannery stood a minute looking at the door, and then he sat down on the edge of the curb to wait for Timmy. The boy came along after a while, indolently as usual, but when he saw Flannery he quickened his pace a little.

"What's th' matter?" he asked. "Locked out?"

Flannery stood up. He did not even say good morning. He ran his hand into his pocket and pulled out the key. "Timmy," he said gently, almost lovingly, "I have business that takes me t' th' other side av town. I have th' confidence in ye, Timmy, t' let ye open up th' office. 'T will be good ixperience fer ye." He cast his eye down the street, where the car line made a turn around the corner. The trolley wire was shaking. "Th' way ye open up," he said slowly, "is t' push th' key into th' keyhole. Push th' key in, Timmy, an' thin turrrn it t' th' lift. Wait!" he called, as Timmy turned. "'Tis important t' turrrn t' th' lift, not th' right. An' whin ye have th' door open"--the car was rounding the corner, and Flannery stepped into the street--"whin ye have th' door open--th' door open"--the car was where he could touch it--"take th' cat out behint th' office an' bury it, an' if ye don't I'll fire ye out av yer job. Mind that!"

The car sped by, and Flannery swung aboard. Timmy watched it until it

went out of sight around the next corner, and then he turned to the office door. He pushed the key in, and turned it to the left.

When Flannery returned the cat was gone, and so was Timmy. The grocer next door handed Flannery the key, and Flannery's face grew red with rage. He opened the door of the office, and for a moment he was sure the cat was not gone, but it was. Flannery could not see the box; it was gone. He threw open the back door and let the wind sweep through the office, and it blew a paper off the desk. Flannery picked it up and read it. It was from Timmy.

"Mike Flannery, esquire," it said. "Take you're old job. I'm tired of the express business. Too much cats and missus Warmans in it. I'm going to New York to look for a decent job. I buried the cat for you but no more for me. You're truly."

Flannery smiled. The loss of Timmy did not bother him so long as the cat had gone also. He turned to the tasks of the day with a light heart.

The afternoon mail brought him a letter from the New York office. "Regarding W.B. 23645," it said, "and in answer to yours of yesterday's date. In our previous communication we clearly requested you to have a veterinary look at the cat. We judge from your letter that you neglected to do this, as the veterinary would certainly have told you what to feed the cat. See the veterinary at once and ask him what to feed the cat. Then feed the cat what he tells you to feed it. We presume it is not necessary for us to tell you to water the cat."

Flannery grinned. "An' ain't thim th' jokers, now!" he exclaimed. "'Tis some smart bye must have his fun with ould Flannery! Go an' see th' veterinary! An' ask him what t' feed th' cat! 'Good mornin', Misther Pomeroy. Do ye remimber th' dead cat ye looked at yisterday? 'Tis in a bad way th' mornin', sor. 'Tis far an' away deader than it was yisterday. We had th' funeral this mornin'. What w'u'd ye be advisin' me t' feed it fer a regular diet now?' Oh yis! I'll go t' th' veterinary--not!"

He stared at the letter frowningly.

"An' 'tis not necessary t' tell me t' water th' cat!" he said. "Oh, no, they'll be trustin' Flannery t' water th' cat. Flannery has loads av time. 'Tis no need fer him t' spind his time doin' th' ixpriss business. 'Git th' sprinklin'-can, Flannery, an' water th' cat. Belike if ye water it well ye'll be havin' a fine flower-bed av long-haired cats out behint th' office. Water th' cat well, an' plant it awn th' sunny side av th' house, an' whin it sprouts transplant it t' th' shady side where it can run up th' trellis. 'T will bloom hearty until cold weather, if watered plinty! Bechune thim an' me 'tis me opinion th' cat was kept too long t' grow well anny more."

Mrs. Warman was very much surprised that afternoon to receive a letter from the express company. As soon as she saw the name of the company in the corner of the envelope her face hardened. She had an intuition that this was to be another case where the suffering public was imposed upon by an overbearing corporation, and she did not mean to be the victim. She had refused the cat. Fond as she was of cats, she had never liked them dead. She was through with that cat. She tore open the envelope. A woman never leaves an envelope unopened. The next moment she was more surprised than before.

"Dear Madam," said the letter. "Regarding a certain cat sent to your address through our company by Hibbert & Jones of this city, while advising you of our entire freedom from responsibility in the matter, all animals being accepted by us at owner's risk only, we beg to make the following communication: The cat is now in storage at our express office in Westcote, and is sick. A letter from our agent there leads us to believe that the cat may not receive the best of attention at his hands. In order that it may be properly fed and cared for we would suggest that you accept the cat from our hands, under protest if you wish, until you can arrange with Messrs. Hibbert & Jones as to the ownership. In asking you to take the cat in this way we have no other object in view than to stop the charges for storage and care, which are accumulating, and to make sure that the cat is receiving good attention. We might say, however, that Hibbert & Jones assure us that the cat is your property, and therefore, until we have assurance to the contrary, we must look to you for all charges for transportation, storage, and care accruing while the cat is left with us. Yours very truly."

When she had read the letter Mrs. Warman's emotions were extremely mixed. She felt an undying anger toward the express company; she felt an entirely different and more personal anger toward the firm of Hibbert & Jones; but above all she felt a great surprise regarding the cat. If ever she had seen a cat that she thought was a thoroughly dead cat this was the cat. She had had many cats in her day, and she had always thought she knew a dead cat when she saw one, and now this dead cat was alive--ailing, perhaps, but alive. The more she considered it, the less likely it seemed to her that she could have been mistaken about the deadness of that cat. It had been offered to her twice. The first time she saw it she knew it was dead, and the second time she saw it she knew it was, if anything, more dead than it had been the first time. The conclusion was obvious. A cat had been sent to her in a box. She had refused to receive a dead cat, and the expressmen had taken the box away again. Now there was a live, but sick, cat in the box. She had her opinion of expressmen, express companies, and especially of the firm of Hibbert & Jones. This full opinion she sent to Hibbert & Jones by the next mail.

The next morning Flannery was feeling fine. He whistled as he went to the nine--twenty train, and whistled as he came back to the office with his hand-truck full of packages and the large express envelope with the

red seals on the back snugly tucked in his inside pocket, but when he opened the envelope and read the first paper that fell out he stopped whistling.

"Agent, Westcote," said the letter. "Regarding W.B. 23645, Hibbert & Jones, consignor of the cat you are holding in storage, advises us that the consignee claims cat you have is not the cat shipped by consignor. Return cat by first train to this office. If the cat is not strong enough to travel alone have veterinary accompany it. Yrs. truly, Interurban Express Company, per J."

At first a grin spread over the face of Flannery. "'Not sthrong enough t' travel alone!'" he said with a chuckle. "If iver there was a sthrong cat 'tis that wan be this time, an' 't w'u'd be a waste av ixpinse t' hire a----" Suddenly his face sobered.

He glanced out of the back door at the square mile of hummocky sand and clay.

"Return cat be firrst trrain t' this office," he repeated blankly. He left his seat and went to the door and looked out. "Return th' cat," he said, and stepped out upon the edge of the soft, new soil. It was all alike in its recently dug appearance. "Th' cat, return it," he repeated, taking steps this way and that way, with his eyes on the clay at his feet. He walked here and there, but one place looked like the others. There was room for ten thousand cats, and one cat might have been buried in any one of ten thousand places. Flannery sighed. Orders were orders, and he went back to the office and locked the doors. He borrowed a coal-scoop from the grocer next door and went out and began to dig up the clay and sand. He dug steadily and grimly. Never, perhaps, in the history of the world had a man worked so hard to dig up a dead cat. Even in ancient Egypt, where the cat was a sacred animal, they did not dig them up when they had them planted. Quite the contrary: it was a crime to dig them up; and Flannery, as he dug, had a feeling that it would be almost a crime to dig up this one. Never, perhaps, did a man dig so hard to find a thing he really did not care to have.

Flannery dug all that morning. At lunch-time he stopped digging--and went without his lunch--long enough to deliver the packages that had come on the early train. As he passed the station he saw a crowd of boys playing hockey with an old tomato-can, and he stopped. When he reached the office he was followed by sixteen boys. Some of them had spades, some of them had small fire-shovels, some had only pointed sticks, but all were ready to dig. He showed them where he had already dug.

"Twenty-five cints apiece, annyhow," he said, "an' five dollars fer th' lucky wan that finds it."

"All right," said one. "Now what is it we are to dig for?"

"'Tis a cat," said Flannery, "a dead wan."

"Go on!" cried the boy sarcastically. "What _is_ it we are to dig for?"

"I can get you a dead cat, mister," said another. "Our cat died."

"'T will not do," said Flannery. "'T is a special cat I'm wantin'. 'T is a long-haired cat, an' 't was dead a long time. Ye can't mistake it whin ye come awn to it. If ye dig up a cat ye know no wan w'u'd want t' have, that 's it."

The sixteen boys dug, and Flannery, in desperation, dug, but a square mile is a large plot of ground to dig over. No one, having observed that cat on the morning when Timmy planted it, would have believed it could be put in any place where it could not be instantly found again. It had seemed like a cat that would advertise itself. But that is just like a cat; it is always around when it is n't needed, and when it is needed it can't be found. Before the afternoon was half over the boys had tired of digging for a dead cat and had gone away, but Flannery kept at it until the sun went down. Then he looked to see how much of the plot was left to dig up. It was nearly all left. As he washed his hands before going to his boarding-house a messenger-boy handed him a telegram. Flannery tore it open with misgivings.

"Cat has not arrived. Must come on night train. Can accept no excuse," it read.

Flannery folded the telegram carefully and put it in his hip pocket. He washed his hands with more deliberate care than he had ever spent on them. He adjusted his coat most carefully on his back, and then walked with dignity to his boarding-house. He knew what would happen. There would be an inspector out from the head office in the morning. Flannery would probably have to look for a new job.

In the morning he was up early, but he was still dignified. He did not put on his uniform, but wore his holiday clothes, with the black tie with the red dots. An inspector is a hard man to face, but a man in his best clothes has more of a show against him. Flannery came to the office the back way; there was a possibility of the inspector's being already at the front door. As he crossed the filled-in meadows he poked unhopefully at the soil here and there, but nothing came of it. But suddenly his eyes lighted on a figure that he knew, just turning out of the alley three buildings from the office. It was Timmy!

Flannery had no chance at all. He ran, but how can a man run in his best clothes across soft, new soil when he is getting a bit too stout? And Timmy had seen him first. When Flannery reached the corner of the alley Timmy was gone, and with a sigh that was partly regret and partly breathlessness from his run Flannery turned into the main street. There was the inspector, sure enough, standing on the curb. Flannery had lost

some of his dignity, but he made up for it in anger. He more than made up for it in the heat he had run himself into. He was red in the face. He met the inspector with a glare of anger.

"There be th' key, if 'tis that ye're wantin', an' ye may take it an' welcome, fer no more will I be ixpriss agint fer a company that sinds long-haired cats dead in a box an' orders me t' kape thim throo th' hot weather fer a fireside companion an' ready riferince av perfumery. How t' feed an' water dead cats av th' long-haired kind I may not know, an' how t' live with dead cats I may not know, but whin t' bury dead cats I _do_ know, an' there be plinty av other jobs where a man is not ordered t' dig up forty-siven acres t' find a cat that was buried none too soon at that!"

"What's that?" said the inspector. "Is that cat dead?"

"An' what have I been tellin' th' dudes in th' head office all th' while?" asked Flannery with asperity. "What but that th' late deceased dead cat was defunct an' no more? An' thim insultin' an honest man with their 'Have ye stholen th' cat out av th' box, Flannery, an' put in an inferior short-haired cat?' I want no more av thim! Here's the key. Good day t' ye!"

"Hold on," said the inspector, putting his hand on Flannery's arm. "You don't go yet. I 'll have a look at your cash and your accounts first. What you say about that cat may be true enough, but we have got to have proof of it. That was a valuable cat, that was. It was an Angora cat, a real Angora cat. You've got to produce that cat before we are through with you."

"Projuce th' cat!" said Flannery angrily. "Th' cat is safe an' sound in th' back lot. I presint ye with th' lot. If 't is not enough fer ye, go awn an' do th' dirthy worrk ye have t' do awn me. I'll dig no more fer th' cat."

The inspector unlocked the door and entered the office. It was hot with the close heat of a room that has been locked up overnight. Just inside the door the inspector stopped and sniffed suspiciously. No express office should have smelled as that one smelled.

"Wan minute!" cried Flannery, pulling away from the inspector's grasp. "Wan minute! I have a hint there be a long-haired cat near by. Wance ye have been near wan av thim ye can niver mistake thim Angora cats. I w'u'd know th' symbol av thim with me eyes shut. 'T is a signal ye c'u'd tell in th' darrk."

He hurried to the back door. The cat was there, all right. A little deader than it had been, perhaps, but it was there on the step, long hair and all.

"Hurroo!" shouted Flannery. "An' me thinkin' I w'u'd niver see it again! Can ye smell th' proof, Misther Inspictor? 'T is good sthrong proof fer ye! An' I sh'u'd have knowed it all th' while. Angora cats I know not be th' spicial species, an' th' long-haired breed av cats is not wan I have associated with much, an' cats so dang dead as this wan I do not kape close in touch with, ginerally, but all cats have a grrand resimblance t' cats. Look at this wan, now. 'T is just like a cat. It kem back."



EDITORIAL FROM THE DIAL, 5/31/1919

Today, Walt Whitman is one hundred years old. During the century since his birth his States have evolved a scene very different from that crude and spacious panorama, extending westward from a narrow selvage of provincial elegance to a fabulous frontier, which seems to us the congruous back ground for his rugged figure. Yet we feel—those of us who attend him at all—that he was spiritually more nearly our contemporary than were any of the other men of letters whose centenaries we have lately celebrated or are soon to celebrate. Many of them represented, more easily and intimately perhaps than Whitman the poet ever represented anything, the textures of the particular segments of life that enclosed them; but in a large loose way Whitman the man increasingly typifies for us the general canvas of that life. At the same time, and even while the scene which he proclaimed as American recedes into a conveniently remote golden age in our national consciousness, Whitman the prophet advances upon us as spokesman for what we like to think are our enduring ideals. No doubt this is the normal career for the prophet: his time melts into history as a single luminous page; he himself is purged and canonized as its surviving hero. Now if there is

any social validity in this prophet-making process, it is perhaps less futile than many think it to be to cull from the master's works passages of plausible contemporary pertinence—"prophecies." Not that the prophet will actually have anticipated the conditions or events to which his words are thus applied, but that he will enrich his readers' desires and thoughts with something of the combined dignity and familiar warmth, of the clearer and closer community of purpose, that accrues from a continuing tradition and that no age can achieve for itself in isolation. Therefore it is not necessary to believe that when Whitman wrote *Years of the Modern* he was predicting the kind of European war we have just passed through, or the sort of peace we are debating, or the Russian Revolution, or any fortunate sequels to any of these events, in order to warm our newer faith in freedom at the fire of his lines:

What historic denouements are those we so rapidly approach ?

I see men marching and countermarching by swift millions,

I see the frontiers and boundaries of the old autocracies broken,

I see the landmarks of European Kings removed,

I see this day the people beginning their landmarks (all others give way).

What whispers are these, O lands, running ahead of you, passing under the seas!

Are all nations communing?



A PLAINT OF COMPLEXITY

By Eunice Tietjens

THE DIAL May 31, 1919

I have too many selves to know the one.
In too complex a schooling was I bred,
Child of too many cities, who have gone
Down all bright cross-roads of the world's desires,
And at too many altars bowed my head
To light too many fires.
One polished self I have, she who can sit
Familiarly at tea with the marquise
And play the exquisite
In silken rustle lined with etiquette,
Chatting in French, Italian, what you please,
Of this and that—
Who sings now at La Scala, what's the gown
Fortuni's planned for "La Louise,"
Or what Les Jeunes are at in London Town.
She can look out
At dusk across Lung' Arno, sigh a bit,
And speak with shadowy feeling of the rout
This brute modernity has made
Of Beauty and of Art;
And sigh with just the proper shade
Of scorn for Guido Reni, just the "Ah!"
For the squeezed martyrs of El Greco.
And I've a modern, rather mannish self,
Lives gladly in Chicago.
She believes f
That woman should come down from off her shelf
Of calm dependence on the male
And labor for her living.
She likes men,
And equal comradeship, and giving
As much as she receives.
She likes discussions lasting half the night— f
Lit up with wit and cigarettes—
Of art, religion, politics and sex,
Science and prostitution. She thinks art
Deals first of all with life, and likes to write
Poems of drug clerks and machinery.
She's very independent—and at heart
A little lonely.
I've a horrid self,
A sort of snob, who's traveled here and there
And drags in references by the hair

To steamship lines, and hotels in Hong Kong,
The temple roofs of Nikko, and the song
Of the Pope's Nightingale.
She always speaks,
In passing, of the great men whom she knows,
And leaves a trail
Of half-impressed but irritated foes.
My other selves dislike her, but we can't
Get rid of her at certain times and places,
And there are faces -
That wake her in me.
I've a self compound of strange, wild things—
Of solitude, and mud, and savagery;
Loves mountain-tops, and deserts,
And the wings
Of great hawks beating black against the sky.
Would love a man to beat her.
I've a self might almost be a nun,
So she loves peace, prim gardens in the sun
Where shadows sift at evening,
Hands at rest,
And the clear lack of questions in her breast.
And deeper yet there is my mother self,
Something not so much I as womankind,
That surges upward from a blind
Immeasurable past.
A little laughing daughter, a cool child
Sudden and lovely as a wild
Young wood-thing, she has somehow caught
And holds half-unbelieving. She has wrought
Love-bands to hold her fast
Of courage, tenderness, and truth,
And memories of her own white youth,
The best I am, or can be.
This self stands
When others come and go, and in her hands
Are balm for wounds and quiet for distractions,
And she's the deepest source of all my actions.
But I've another self she does not touch,
A self I live in much, and overmuch
These latter years.
A self who stands apart from outward things,
From pleasure and from tears,
And all the little things I say and do.
She feels that action traps her, and she swings
Sheer out of life sometimes, and loses sense
Of boundaries and of impotence.
I think she touches something, and her eyes
Grope, almost seeing, through the veil
Towards the eternal beauty in the skies

And the last loveliness that cannot fail.
But what she sees in her far spirit world,
Or what the center is
Of all this whirl of crowding I's,
I cannot tell you—only this,
That I've too many selves to know the one,
In too complex a schooling was I bred,
Child of too many cities, who have gone
Down all bright cross-roads of the world's desires,
And at too many altars bowed my head
To light too many fires.



THE REVOLT OF "MOTHER."

By Mary E. Wilkins Freeman,
from the Internet Archive etext of *A New England Nun*

" FATHER !"

" What is it ?"

" What are them men diggin over there in the field for?"

There was a sudden dropping and enlarging of the lower part of the old man s face, as if some heavy weight had settled therein he shut his mouth tight, and went on harnessing the great bay mare. He hustled the collar on to her neck with a jerk.

" Father !"

The old man slapped the saddle upon the mare s back.

" Look here, father, I want to know what them men are diggin over in the field for, an I m goin to know."

" I wish you d go into the house, mother, an tend to your own affairs," the old man said then. He ran his words together, and his speech was almost as inarticulate as a growl.

But the woman understood ; it was her most native tongue.
" I ain t goin into the house till you tell me what them men
are doin over there in the field," said she.

Then she stood waiting. She was a small woman, short
and straight-waisted like a child in her brown cotton gown.
Her forehead was mild and benevolent between the smooth
curves of gray hair ; there were meek downward lines about
her nose and mouth - } but her eyes, fixed upon the old man,
looked as if the meekness had been the result of her own
will, never of the will of another.

They were in the barn, standing before the wide open
doors. The spring air, full of the smell of growing grass
and unseen blossoms, came in their faces. The deep yard
in front was littered with farm wagons and piles of wood ;
on the edges, close to the fence and the house, the grass
was a vivid green, and there were some dandelions.

The old man glanced doggedly at his wife as he tightened
the last buckles on the harness. She looked as immovable
to him as one of the rocks in his pasture-land, bound to the
earth with generations of blackberry vines. He slapped the
reins over the horse, and started forth from the barn.

11 Father /" said she.

The old man pulled up. " What is it ?"

" I want to know what them men are diggin over there in
that field for."

" They re diggin a cellar, I s pose, if you ve got to
know."

"A cellar for what?"

" A barn."

" A barn ? You ain t goin to build a barn over there
where we was goin to have a house, father ?"

The old man said not another word. He hurried the
horse into the farm wagon, and clattered out of the yard,
jouncing as sturdily on his seat as a boy.

The woman stood a moment looking after him, then she
went out of the barn across a corner of the yard to the
house. The house, standing at right angles with the great
barn and a long reach of sheds and out-buildings, was in

finitesimal compared with them. It was scarcely as commodious for people as the little boxes under the barn eaves were for doves.

A pretty girl's face, pink and delicate as a flower, was looking out of one of the house windows. She was watching three men who were digging over in the field which bounded the yard near the road line. She turned quietly when the woman entered.

"What are they digging for, mother?" said she. "Did he tell you?"

"They're diggin' for a cellar for a new barn."

"Oh, mother, he ain't going to build another barn?"

"That's what he says."

A boy stood before the kitchen glass combing his hair. He combed slowly and painstakingly, arranging his brown hair in a smooth hillock over his forehead. He did not seem to pay any attention to the conversation.

"Sammy, did you know father was going to build a new barn?" asked the girl.

The boy combed assiduously.

"Sammy!"

He turned, and showed a face like his father's under his smooth crest of hair. "Yes, I suppose I did," he said, reluctantly.

"How long have you known it?" asked his mother.

"Bout three months, I guess."

"Why didn't you tell of it?"

"Didn't think it would do no good."

"I don't see what father wants another barn for," said the girl, in her sweet, slow voice. She turned again to the window, and stared out at the digging men in the field. Her tender, sweet face was full of a gentle distress. Her forehead was as bald and innocent as a baby's, with the light hair strained back from it in a row of curl-papers. She was quite large, but her soft curves did not look as if they cov

ered muscles.

Her mother looked sternly at the boy. " Is he goin to buy more cows ?" said she.

The boy did not reply ; he was tying his shoes.

" Sammy, I want you to tell me if he s goin to buy more cows."

" I s pose he is."

"How many?"

" Four, I guess."

His mother said nothing more. She went into the pantry, and there was a clatter of dishes. The boy got his cap from a nail behind the door, took an old arithmetic from the shelf, and started for school. He was lightly built, but clumsy. He went out of the yard with a curious spring in the hips, that made his loose home-made jacket tilt up in the rear.

The girl went to the sink, and began to wash the diihes that were piled up there. Her mother came promptly out of the pantry, and shoved her aside. " You wipe em," said she ; " I ll wash. There s a good many this mornin ."

The mother plunged her hands vigorously into the water, the girl wiped the plates slowly and dreamily. " Mother," said she, " don t you think it s too bad father s going to build that new barn, much as we need a decent house to live in ? rt

Her mother scrubbed a dish fiercely. " You ain t found out yet we re women-folks, Nanny Penn," said she. "You ain t seen enough of men-folks yet to. One of these days you ll find it out, an then you ll know that we know only what men-folks think we do, so far as any use of it goes, an 7 how we d ought to reckon men-folks in with Providence, an 1 not complain of what they do any more than we do of the weather."

" I don t care ; I don t believe George is anything like that, anyhow," said Nanny. Her delicate face flushed pink, her lips pouted softly, as if she were going to cry.

"You wait an see. I guess George Eastman ain t no better than other men. You hadn t ought to judge father, though. He can t help it, cause he don t look at things

jest the way we do. An we ve been pretty comfortable here, after all. The roof don t leak ain t never but once that s one thing. Father s kept it shingled right up."

" I do wish we had a parlor."

" I guess it won t hurt George Eastman any to come to see you in a nice clean kitchen. I guess a good many girls don t have as good a place as this. Nobody s ever heard me complain."

" I ain t complained either, mother."

"Well, I don t think you d better, a good father an a good home as you ve got. S pose your father made you go out an work for your livin ? Lots of girls have to that ain t no stronger an l better able to than you be."

Sarah Penn washed the frying-pan with a conclusive air. She scrubbed the outside of it as faithfully as the inside. She was a masterly keeper of her box of a house. Her one living-room never seemed to have in it any of the dust which the friction of life with inanimate matter produces. She swept, and there seemed to be no dirt to go before the broom ; she cleaned, and one could see no difference. She was like an artist so perfect that he has apparently no art To-day she got out a mixing bowl and a board, and rolled some pies, and there was no more flour upon her than upon her daughter who was doing finer work. Nanny was to be married in the fall, and she was sewing on some white cambric and embroidery. She sewed industriously while her mother cooked, her soft milk-white hands and wrists showed whiter than her delicate work.

" We must have the stove moved out in the shed before long," said Mrs. Penn. " Talk about not havin things, it s been a real blessin* to be able to put a stove up in that shed in hot weather. Father did one good thing when he fixed that stove-pipe out there."

Sarah Penn s face as she rolled her pies had that expression of meek vigor which might have characterized one of the New Testament saints. She was making mince-pies. Her husband, Adoniram Penn, liked them better than any other kind. She baked twice a week. Adoniram often liked a piece of pie between meals. She hurried this morning. It had been later than usual when she began, and she wanted to have a pie baked for dinner. However deep a resentment she might be forced to hold against her husband, she would never fail in sedulous attention to his

wants.

Nobility of character manifests itself at loop-holes when it is not provided with large doors. Sarah Penn's showed itself to-day in flaky dishes of pastry. So she made the pies faithfully, while across the table she could see, when she glanced up from her work, the sight that rankled in her patient and steadfast soul the digging of the cellar of the new barn in the place where Adoniram forty years ago had promised her their new house should stand.

The pies were done for dinner. Adoniram and Sammy were home a few minutes after twelve o'clock. The dinner was eaten with serious haste. There was never much conversation at the table in the Penn family. Adoniram asked a blessing, and they ate promptly, then rose up and went about their work.

Sammy went back to school, taking soft sly lopes out of the yard like a rabbit. He wanted a game of marbles before school, and feared his father would give him some chores to do. Adoniram hastened to the door and called after him, but he was out of sight.

"I don't see what you let him go for, mother," said he.
"I wanted him to help me unload that wood."

Adoniram went to work out in the yard unloading wood from the wagon. Sarah put away the dinner dishes, while Nanny took down her curl-papers and changed her dress. She was going down to the store to buy some more embroidery and thread.

When Nanny was gone, Mrs. Penn went to the door.
"Father!" she called.

"Well, what is it!"

"I want to see you jest a minute, father."

"I can't leave this wood nohow. I've got to get it unloaded and go for a load of gravel afore two o'clock. Sammy had ought to helped me. You hadn't ought to let him go to school so early."

"I want to see you jest a minute."

"I tell ye I can't, nohow, mother."

"Father, you come here." Sarah Penn stood in the door

like a queen ; she held her head as if it bore a crown ; there was that patience which makes authority royal in her voice. Adoniram went.

Mrs. Penn led the way into the kitchen, and pointed to a chair. " Sit down, father," said she ; " I ve got somethin I want to say to you."

He sat down heavily; his face was quite stolid, but he looked at her with restive eyes. " Well, what is it, mother?"

" I want to know what you re buildin that new barn for, father?"

" I ain t got nothin to say about it."

" It can t be you think you need another barn ?"

" I tell ye I ain t got nothin to say about it, mother ; an I ain t goin to say nothin 1 ."

" Be you goin to buy more cows ?"

Adoniram did not reply; he shut his mouth tight.

" I know you be, as well as I want to. Now, father, look here" Sarah Penn had not sat down ; she stood before her husband in the humble fashion of a Scripture woman * I m goin to talk real plain to you j I never have sence I married you, but I m goin to now. I ain t never complained, an* I ain t goin to complain now, but I m goin to talk plain. You see this room here, father ; you look at it well. You see there ain t no carpet on the floor, an you see the paper is all dirty, an* droppin off the walls. We ain t had no new paper on it for ten year, an then I put it on myself, an it didn t cost but ninepence a roll. You see this room, father ; it s all the one I ve had to work in an eat in an sit in sence we was married. There ain t another woman in the whole town whose husband ain t got half the means you have but what s got better. It s all the room Nanny s got to have her company in ; an there ain t one of her mates but what s got better, an their fathers not so able as hers is. It s all the room she ll have to be married in. What would you have thought, father, if we had had our xveddin in a room no better than this ? I was married in my mother s parlor, with a carpet on the floor, an stuffed furniture, an a mahogany card - table. An this is all the room any daughter will have to be married in. Look here, father !"

Sarah Penn went across the room as though it were a tragic stage. She flung open a door and disclosed a tiny bedroom, only large enough for a bed and bureau, with a path between. "There, father," said she "there's all the room I've had to sleep in forty year. All my children were born there the two that died, an the two that's livin'. I was sick with a fever there."

She stepped to another door and opened it. It led into the small, ill-lighted pantry. "Here," said she, "is all the buttery I've got every place I've got for my dishes, to set away my victuals in, an to keep my milk-pans in. Father, I've been takin care of the milk of six cows in this place, an now you're goin to build a new barn, an keep more cows, an* give me more to do in it."

She threw open another door. A narrow crooked flight of stairs wound upward from it. "There, father," said she, "I want you to look at the stairs that go up to them two unfinished chambers that are all the places our son an daughter have had to sleep in all their lives. There ain't a prettier girl in town nor a more ladylike one than Nanny, an that's the place she has to sleep in. It ain't so good as your horse's stall; it ain't so warm an tight."

Sarah Penn went back and stood before her husband. "Now, father," said she, "I want to know if you think you're doin right an accordin to what you profess. Here, when we was married, forty year ago, you promised me faithful that we should have a new house built in that lot over in the field before the year was out. You said you had money enough, an you wouldn't ask me to live in no such place as this. It is forty year now, an you've been makin' more money, an i've been savin' of it for you ever since, an you ain't built no house yet. You've built sheds an cow-houses an one new barn, an now you're goin to build another. Father, I want to know if you think it's right. You're lodgin your dumb beasts better than you are your own flesh an blood. I want to know if you think it's right."

"I ain't got nothin to say."

"You can't say nothin without ownin it ain't right, father. An there's another thing I ain't complained; I've got along forty year, an I s'pose I should forty more, it wa'n't for that if we don't have another house. Nanny jhe can't live with us after she's married. She'll have to go somewheres else to live away from us, an it don't seem as if I could have it so, noways, father. She wa'n't ever

strong. She s got considerable color, but there wa n t never any backbone to her. I ve always took the heft of every thing off her, an she ain t fit to keep house an do every thing herself. She ll be all worn out inside of a year. Think of her doin all the washin an ironin an bakin with them soft white hands an arms, an sweepin ! I can t have it so, noways, father."

Mrs. Penn s face was burning ; her mild eyes gleamed. She had pleaded her little cause like a Webster ; she had ranged from severity to pathos ; but her opponent employed that obstinate silence which makes eloquence futile with mocking echoes. Adoniram arose clumsily.

" Father, ain t you got nothin to say ?" said Mrs. Penn.

" I ve got to go off after that load of gravel. I can t Stan here talkin all day."

" Father, won t you think it over, an have a house built there instead of a barn ?"

" I ain t got nothin to say."

Adoniram shuffled out. Mrs. Penn went into her bed room. When she came out, her eyes were red. She had a roll of unbleached cotton cloth. She spread it out on the kitchen table, and began cutting out some shirts for her husband. The men over in the field had a team to help them this afternoon ; she could hear their halloos. She had a scanty pattern for the shirts ; she had to plan and piece the sleeves.

Nanny came home with her embroidery, and sat down with her needlework. She had taken down her curl-papers, and there was a soft roll of fair hair like an aureole over her forehead ; her face was as delicately fine and clear as porcelain. Suddenly she looked up, and the tender red flamed all over her face and neck. " Mother," said she.

" What say ?"

" I ve been thinking I don t see how we re goin to have any wedding in this room. I d be ashamed to have his folks come if we didn t have anybody else."

" Mebbe we can have some new paper before then ; I can put it on. I guess you won t have no call to be ashamed of your belongin s."

" We might have the wedding in the new barn," said Nanny, with gentle pettishness. " Why, mother, what makes you look so ?"

Mrs. Penn had started, and was staring at her with a curious expression. She turned again to her work, and spread out a pattern carefully on the cloth. " Nothin'," said she.

Presently Adoniram clattered out of the yard in his two-wheeled dump cart, standing as proudly upright as a Roman charioteer. Mrs. Penn opened the door and stood there a minute looking out ; the halloos of the men sounded louder.

It seemed to her all through the spring months that she heard nothing but the halloos and the noises of saws and hammers. The new barn grew fast. It was a fine edifice for this little village. Men came on pleasant Sundays, in their meeting suits and clean shirt bosoms, and stood around it admiringly. Mrs. Penn did not speak of it, and Adoniram did not mention it to her, although sometimes, upon a return from inspecting it, he bore himself with injured dignity.

"It s a strange thing how your mother feels about the new barn," he said, confidentially, to Sammy one day.

Sammy only grunted after an odd fashion for a boy ; he had learned it from his father.

The barn was all completed ready for use by the third week in July. Adoniram had planned to move his stock in on Wednesday; on Tuesday he received a letter which changed his plans. He came in with it early in the morning. " Sammy s been to the post-office," said he, " an I ve got a letter from Hiram." Hiram was Mrs. Penn s brother, who lived in Vermont.

" Well," said Mrs. Penn, " what does he say about the folks?"

" I guess they re all right. He says he thinks if I come up country right off there s a chance to buy jest the kind of a horse I want." He stared reflectively out of the window at the new barn.

Mrs. Penn was making pies. She went on clapping the rolling-pin into the crust, although she was very pale, and her heart beat loudly.

" I dun know but what I d better go," said Adoniram. " I hate to go off jest now, right in the midst of hayin , but the

ten-acre lot s cut, an I guess Rufus an the others can git along without me three or four days. I can t get a horse tound here to suit me, nohow, an I ve got to have another for all that wood-haulin in the fall. I told Hiram to watch out, an v if he got wind of a good horse to let me know. I guess I d better go."

" I ll get out your clean shirt an collar," said Mrs. Penn calmly.

She laid out Adoniram s Sunday suit and his clean clothes on the bed in the little bedroom. She got his shav ing-water and razor ready. At last she buttoned on his collar and fastened his black cravat.

Adoniram never wore his collar and cravat except on extra occasions. He held his head high, with a rasped dignity. When he was all ready, with his coat and hat brushed, and a lunch of pie and cheese in a paper bag, he hesitated on the threshold of the door. He looked at his wife, and his manner was defiantly apologetic, "j^them cows come to-day, Sammy can drive em into the new barn," said he ; " an when they bring the hay up, they can pitch it in there."

" Well," replied Mrs. Penn.

Adoniram set his shaven face ahead and started. When he had cleared the door-step, he turned and looked back with a kind of nervous solemnity. "I shall be back by Saturday if nothin happens," said he.

" Do be careful, father," returned his wife.

She stood in the door with Nanny at her elbow and watched him out of sight. Her eyes had a strange, doubtful expression in them ; her peaceful forehead was contracted. She went in, and about her baking again. Nanny sat sewing. Her wedding-day was drawing nearer, and she was getting pale and thin with her steady sewing. Her mother kept glancing at her.

" Have you got that pain in your side this mornin*?" she asked.

" A little."

Mrs. Penn s face, as she worked, changed, her perplexed forehead smoothed, her eyes were steady, her lips firmly set.

She formed a maxim for herself, although incoherently with her unlettered thoughts. " Unsolicited opportunities are the guide-posts of the Lord to the new roads of life," she repeated in effect, and she made up her mind to her course of action.

" S posin I had wrote to Hiram," she muttered once, when she was in the pantry " s posin I had wrote, an asked him if he knew ot any horse ? But I didn t, an father s goin wa n t none of my doin . It looks like a providence." Her voice rang out quite loud at the last.

" What you talkin about, mother ?" called Nanny.

" Nothin ."

Mrs. Penn hurried her baking ; at eleven o clock it was all done. The load of hay from the west field came slowly down the cart track, and drew up at the new barn. Mrs. Penn ran out. " Stop !" she screamed " stop !"

The men stopped and looked ; Sammy upreared from the top of the load, and stared at his mother.

" Stop !" she cried out again. " Don t you put the hay in that barn ; put it in the old one."

"Why, he said to put it in here," returned one of the hay makers, wonderingly. He was a young man, a neighbor s son, whom Adoniram hired by the year to help on the farm.

" Don t you put the hay in the new barn ; there s room enough in the old one, ain t there?" said Mrs. Penn.

" Room enough," returned the hired man, in his thick, rustic tones. " Didn t need the new barn, nohow, far as room s concerned. Well, I s pose he changed his mind." He took hold of the horses bridles.

Mrs. Penn went back to the house. Soon the kitchen windows were darkened, and a fragrance like warm honey came into the room.

Nanny laid down her work. " I thought father wanted them to put the hay into the new barn ?" she said, wonderingly.

" It s all right," replied her mother.

Sammy slid down from the load of hay, and came in to see if dinner was ready.

" I ain t goin to get a regular dinner to-day, as long as father s gone," said his mother. " I ve let the fire go out. You can have some bread an milk an pie. I thought we could get along." She set out some bowls of milk, some bread, and a pie on the kitchen table. " You d better eat your dinner now," said she. " You might jest as well get through with it. I want you to help me afterward."

Nanny and Sammy stared at each other. There was something strange in their mother s manner. Mrs. Penn did not eat anything herself. She went into the pantry, and they heard her moving dishes while they ate. Presently she came out with a pile of plates. She got the clothes-basket out of the shed, and packed them in it. Nanny and Sammy watched. She brought out cups and saucers, and put them in with the plates.

"What you goin to do, mother?" inquired Nanny, in a timid voice. A sense of something unusual made her tremble, as if it were a ghost. Sammy rolled his eyes over his pie.

"You ll see what I m goin to do," replied Mrs. Penn.

"If you re through, Nanny, I want you to go up-stairs an pack up your things ; an I want you, Sammy, to help me take down the bed in the bedroom."

" Oh, mother, what for ?" gasped Nanny.

"You ll see."

During the next few hours a feat was performed by this simple, pious New England mother which was equal in its way to Wolfe s storming of the Heights of Abraham. It took no more genius and audacity of bravery for Wolfe to cheer his wondering soldiers up those steep precipices, under the sleeping eyes of the enemy, than for Sarah Penn, at the head of her children, to move all their little household goods into the new barn while her husband was away.

Nanny and Sammy followed their mother s instructions without a murmur ; indeed, they were overawed. There is a certain uncanny and superhuman quality about all such purely original undertakings as their mother s was to them. Nanny went back and forth with her light loads, and Sammy tugged with sober energy.

At five o clock in the afternoon the little house in which the Penns had lived for forty years had emptied itself into the new barn.

Every builder builds somewhat for unknown purposes, and is in a measure a prophet. The architect of Adoniram Penn's barn, while he designed it for the comfort of four-footed animals, had planned better than he knew for the comfort of humans. Sarah Penn saw at a glance its possibilities. Those great box-stalls, with quilts hung before them, would make better bedrooms than the one she had occupied for forty years, and there was a tight carriage-room. The harness-room, with its chimney and shelves, would make a kitchen of her dreams. The great middle space would make a parlor, by-and-by, fit for a palace. Up stairs there was as much room as down. With partitions and windows, what a house would there be ! Sarah looked at the row of stanchions before the allotted space for cows, and reflected that she would have her front entry there.

At six o'clock the stove was up in the harness-room, the kettle was boiling, and the table set for tea. It looked almost as home-like as the abandoned house across the yard had ever done. The young hired man milked, and Sarah directed him calmly to bring the milk to the new barn. He came gaping, dropping little blots of foam from the brimming pails on the grass. Before the next morning he had spread the story of Adoniram Penn's wife moving into the new barn all over the little village. Men assembled in the store and talked it over, women with shawls over their heads scuttled into each other's houses before their work was done. Any deviation from the ordinary course of life in this quiet town was enough to stop all progress in it. Everybody paused to look at the staid, independent figure on the side track. There was a difference of opinion with regard to her. Some held her to be insane ; some, of a lawless and rebellious spirit.

Friday the minister went to see her. It was in the forenoon, and she was at the barn door shelling pease for dinner. She looked up and returned his salutation with dignity, then she went on with her work. She did not invite him in. The saintly expression of her face remained fixed, but there was an angry flush over it.

The minister stood awkwardly before her, and talked. She handled the pease as if they were bullets. At last she looked up, and her eyes showed the spirit that her meek front had covered for a lifetime.

" There ain't no use talkin', Mr. Hersey," said she. " I've thought it all over an over, an I believe I'm doin' what's right. I've made it the subject of prayer, an it's betwixt

me an the Lord an Adoniram. There ain t no call for nobody else to worry about it."

" Well, of course, if you have brought it to the Lord 19 prayer, and feel satisfied that you are doing right, Mrs. Penn," said the minister, helplessly. His thin gray-bearded face was pathetic. He was a sickly man ; his youthful confidence had cooled ; he had to scourge himself up to some of his pastoral duties as relentlessly as a Catholic ascetic, and then he was prostrated by the smart

" I think it s right jest as much as I think it was right for our forefathers to come over from the old country cause they didn t have what belonged to em," said Mrs. Penn. She arose. The barn threshold might have been Plymouth Rock from her bearing. " I don t doubt you mean well, Mr. Hersey," said she, " but there are things people hadn t ought to interfere with. I ve been a member of the church for over forty year. I ve got my own mind an my own feet, an I m goin to think my own thoughts an go my own ways, an nobody but the Lord is goin to dictate to me unless I ve a mind to have him. Won t you come in an set down ? How is Mis Hersey ?"

" She is well, I thank you," replied the minister. He added some more perplexed apologetic remarks; then he retreated.

He could expound the intricacies of every character study in the Scriptures, he was competent to grasp the Pilgrim Fathers and all historical innovators, but Sarah Penn was beyond him. He could deal with primal cases, but parallel ones worsted him. But, after all, although it was aside from his province, he wondered more how Adoniram Penn would deal with his wife than how the Lord would. Everybody shared the wonder. When Adoniram s four new cows arrived, Sarah ordered three to be put in the old barn, the other in the house shed where the cooking-stove had stood. That added to the excitement. It was whispered that all four cows were domiciled in the house.

Towards sunset on Saturday, when Adoniram was ex-
3*

pected home, there was a knot of men in the road near the new barn. The hired man had milked, but he still hung around the premises. Sarah Penn had supper all ready. There were brown-bread and baked beans and a custard

pie ; it was the supper that Adoniram loved on a Saturday night. She had on a clean calico, and she bore herself imperturbably. Nanny and Sammy kept close at her heels. Their eyes were large, and Nanny was full of nervous tremors. Still there was to them more pleasant excitement than anything else. An inborn confidence in their mother over their father asserted itself.

Sammy looked out of the harness-room window. " There he is," he announced, in an awed whisper. He and Nanny peeped around the casing. Mrs. Penn kept on about her work. The children watched Adoniram leave the new horse standing in the drive while he went to the house door. It was fastened. Then he went around to the shed. That door was seldom locked, even when the family was away. The thought how her father would be confronted by the cow flashed upon Nanny. There was a hysterical sob in her throat. Adoniram emerged from the shed and stood looking about in a dazed fashion. His lips moved; he was saying something, but they could not hear what it was. The hired man was peeping around a corner of the old barn, but nobody saw him.

Adoniram took the new horse by the bridle and led him across the yard to the new barn. Nanny and Sammy slunk close to their mother. The barn doors rolled back, and there stood Adoniram, with the long mild face of the great Canadian farm horse looking over his shoulder.

Nanny kept behind her mother, but Sammy stepped suddenly forward, and stood in front of her.

Adoniram stared at the group. "What on airth you all down here for ?" said he. " What s the matter over to the house ?"

"We ve come here to live, father," said Sammy. His shrill voice quavered out bravely.

"What" Adoniram sniffed "what is it smells like cookin ?" said he. He stepped forward and looked in the open door of the harness-room. Then he turned to his wife. His old bristling face was pale and frightened. " What on airth does this mean, mother ?" he gasped.

"You come in here, father," said Sarah. She led the way into the harness-room and shut the door. " Now, father/ said she, "you needn t be scared. I ain t crazy. There ain t nothin to be upset over. But we ve come here to live, an we re goin to live here. We ve got jest as good

a right here as new horses an cows. The house wa n t fit for us to live in any longer, an I made up my mind I wa n t goin to stay there. I ve done my duty by you forty year, an I m goin to do it now ; but I m goin to live here. You ve got to put in some windows and partitions; an you ll have to buy some furniture."

"Why, mother!" the old man gasped.

" You d better take your coat off an get washed there s the wash-basin an then we ll have supper."

"Why, mother!"

Sammy went past the window, leading the new horse to the old barn. The old man saw him, and shook his head speechlessly. He tried to take off his coat, but his arms seemed to lack the power. His wife helped him. She poured some water into the tin basin, and put in a piece of soap. She got the comb and brush, and smoothed his thin gray hair after he had washed. Then she put the beans, hot bread, and tea on the table. Sammy came in, and the family drew up. Adoniram sat looking dazedly at his plate, and they waited.

" Ain t you goin to ask a blessin , father ?" said Sarah.

And the old man bent his head and mumbled.

All through the meal he stopped eating at intervals, and stared furtively at his wife ; but he ate well. The home food tasted good to him, and his old frame was too sturdily healthy to be affected by his mind. But after supper he went out, and sat down on the step of the smaller door at the right of the barn, through which he had meant his Jerseys to pass in stately file, but which Sarah designed for her front house door, and he leaned his head on his hands.

After the supper dishes were cleared away and the milk-pans washed, Sarah went out to him. The twilight was deepening. There was a clear green glow in the sky. Before them stretched the smooth level of field ; in the distance was a cluster of hay-stacks like the huts of a village ; the air was very cool and calm and sweet. The landscape might have been an ideal one of peace.

Sarah bent over and touched her husband on one of his thin, sinewy shoulders. " Father !"

The old man s shoulders heaved : he was weeping.

" Why, don t do so, father," said Sarah.

"I ll put up the partitions, an* everything you want, mother."

Sarah put her apron up to her face ; she was overcome by her own triumph.

Adoniram was like a fortress whose walls had no active resistance, and went down the instant the right besieging tools were used. " Why, mother," he said, hoarsely, u I hadn t no idee you was so set on t as all this comes to."



FRESH AIR FIEND

By Kris Neville

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*Sick and helpless, he was very lucky to have a
faithful native woman to nurse him. Or was he?*

He rolled over to look at the plants. They were crinkled and dead and useless in the narrow flower box across the hut. He tried to draw his arm under his body to force himself erect. The reserve oxygen began to hiss in sleepily. He tried to signal Hertha to help him, but she was across the room with her back to him, her hands fumbling with a bowl of dark, syrupy medicine. His lips moved, but the words died in his throat.

He wanted to explain to her that scientists in huge laboratories with many helpers and millions of dollars had been unable to find a cure for liguna fever. He wanted to explain that no brown liquid, made like cake batter, would cure the disease that had decimated the crews of two expeditions to Sitari and somehow gotten back to cut down the population of Wiblanihaven.

But, watching her, he could understand what she thought she was doing. At one time she must have seen a pharmacist put chemicals into a mortar and grind them with a pestle. This, she must have remembered, was what people did to make medicine, and now she put what chemical-appearing substances she could locate--flour, powdered coffee, lemon extract, salt--into a bowl and mashed them together. She was very intent on her work and it probably made her feel almost helpful.

Finally she moved out of his field of vision; he found that he could not turn his head to follow her with his eyes. He lay conscious but inert, like waterlogged wood on a river bottom. He heard sounds of her movement. At last he slept.

* * * * *

He awakened with a start. His head was clearer than it had been for hours. He listened to the oxygen hissing in again. He tried to read the dial on the far wall, but it blurred before his eyes.

"Hertha," he said.

She came quickly to his cot.

"What does the oxygen register say?"

"Oxygen register?"

He gritted his teeth against the fever which began to shake his body mercilessly until he wanted to scream to make it stop. He became angry even as the fever shook him: angry not really at the doctors; not really at any one thing. Angry because the mountains did not care if he saw them; angry that the air did not care if he breathed it. Angry because, between planets, between suns, the coldness of space merely waited, not giving a damn.

Several years ago--ten, twenty, perhaps more--some doctor had finally isolated a strain of the filterable virus of liguna fever that could be used as a vaccine: too weak to kill, but strong enough to produce immunity against its more virulent brother strains. That opened up the Sitari System for colonization and exploration and meant that the men who got there first would make fortunes.

So he went to the base at Ke, first selling his strip mine property and disposing of his tools and equipping his spaceship for the intersolar trip; and at Ke they shot him full of the disease. But his bloodstream built no antibodies. The weakened virus settled in his nervous system and there was no way of getting it out. The doctors were very sorry for him, and they assured him it was a one-in-ten-thousand phenomenon. Thereafter, he suffered recurrent paralytic attacks.

If it had not been for the advance warning--a pain at the base of his spine, a moment of violent trembling in his knees--he would have been forced to give up solitary strip mining altogether. As it was, whenever he felt the warning, he had to hurry to the nearest colony and be hospitalized for the duration of the attack. He had had four such warnings on this satellite, and three times he had gone to Pastiville on Helio and been cared for and come away with less money than he had gone with.

His bank credit, once large, had slowly dribbled away, and now he made just about enough from his mining to care for himself during illness. He could not afford to hunt for less dangerous, less isolated work. It would not pay enough, for he knew how to do very little that civilization needed done. He was finally trapped; no longer could he afford a pilot for the long flight from Helio to a newer frontier, and he could not risk the trip alone.

He lay waiting for the new spasm of fever and stared at Hertha who,

this time, would care for him here and he would not need to go to a hospital. Perhaps, after a little while, he would be able to save enough to push on, through the awful indifference of space, to some new world where, with luck, there would be a sudden fortune.

Then he could go back to civilization.

He realized bitterly that he was merely telling himself he would go back. He knew there was only one direction he could go, and that direction was not back.

Hertha waited, hurt-eyed, moving her pudgy hands helplessly.

When the shaking subsided, he explained through chattering teeth about the oxygen register across the room, and she went away.

* * * * *

The fever vanished completely, leaving him listless. His hand, lying on the rough blanket, was abnormally white. He wiggled the fingers, but he could not feel the wool.

His mouth was dry and he wanted a drink of water.

Hertha moved out of his range of vision. He shifted his head on the damp pillow and watched her out of the corner of his eye.

He had never heard her real name, but she did not seem to object to his name for her.

I am that which began;
Out of me the years roll;
Out of me God and man;
I am equal and whole;
God changes, and man,
And the form of them bodily;
I am the soul.

He tried to sit up again, but he was very weak. He wanted to quote it to her and tell her what he had never told her: that the name of it was _Hertha_ and that it had been written long ago by a man named Swinburne, and he wanted to explain why he had named her after a poem, because it was very funny.

The harsh light hurt his eyes and made him feel dizzy. He lay watching her as she bent toward the oxygen dial, wrinkling her face in animal concentration, trying to read it for him. Her puzzled expression was pathetic; it reminded him of the first time he had seen her.

The walls began to spin crazily, for the hut had been intended for only

one person.

He remembered the first time he saw her, cowering in a filthy alleyway in the Miramus. At first he thought she had taken some food from a garbage pail and was trying to conceal it by holding it to her breast. But when the flare of a rocket leaving the field two blocks away lit the area for a moment, he saw that she was holding a tiny welikin, terribly mangled, looking as if it had just been run over by a heavy transport truck. He took it away from her and threw it into the darkness, shuddering.

"It was dead," he said.

She continued to stare at him, starting to cry silently, big, round, salt tears that she brushed at with reddened hands.

"My--my--" she stammered.

He had an eerie feeling that she was trying to say, "My baby," and he felt a little chill of pity creep up his spine.

"What do you do?" he asked kindly.

"Sweep floors. I work a little for the Commander's wife. Around her home."

"How did you get here?"

Still crying, she said, "On a rocket."

"Of course. What I meant was...." But he did not need to ask how she had gotten passed the emigration officers. Some influential man--such things could happen, especially when the destination was a relatively new frontier, such as Helio, where there was little danger of investigation--had seen to it that certain answers were falsified; and a little money and a corrupt official had conspired to produce a passport which read, "Mentally and physically fit for colonization."

The influential man had, in effect, bought and paid for a personal slave to bring with him to the stars. She would not know of her legal rights. She would be easily frightened and confused. And then something had happened, and for some reason she had been abandoned to shift for herself. Perhaps she had run away.

He looked away from her face. This was none of his affair.

"Never mind," he said. He reached into his pocket and gave her a few coins and then turned and walked rapidly away, suddenly anxious to see the bright, remembered face of the young colonist, Doris, Don's friend; a face that would chase away the memory of this pathetic creature.

After a moment, he heard the pad of her feet hopefully, fearfully following him.

* * * * *

She was standing beside his cot again, and he concentrated to make the walls stop spinning.

"It had a blue line."

"Yes, I know. Where?"

She showed him with her fingers. "This much."

"Halfway up?" he prompted.

Dumbly, she nodded.

He looked at the plants. "Hertha, listen. I've got to talk before the paralysis comes back. You'll have to listen very carefully and try to understand. I'll be all right in about ten days. You know that?"

She nodded again.

He took a deep breath that seemed to catch in his throat. "But you'll have to go outside before then."

Hertha whimpered and fluttered her hands nervously.

"I know you're afraid," he said. "I wouldn't ask you, but it has to be done. I can't go. You can see that, can't you? It has to be done."

"Afraid!"

"Nonsense!" he said harshly. "There's nothing to be afraid of. Put on the outside suit and nothing can hurt you."

Moaning in fear, she shook her head.

"Listen, Hertha! You've got to do it. For me!" He did not like to make the appeal personal. He would have preferred to convince her that fear of the outside was groundless. It was not possible. He had attempted, again and again, to explain that the tiny satellite with its poison air was completely harmless as long as she wore a surface suit. There was no alien life, no possible danger, outside this tiny square of insulated hut and breathable air. But it was useless. And the personal appeal was the only course remaining. It was as much for her sake as his; she also needed oxygen, but she could never understand that fact.

"For you?" she asked.

He nodded, feeling the fever rise. His face twisted in pain, and he stared pleadingly into her cow-like eyes: dumb eyes, animal eyes, brown and trusting and ... loyal. The paralysis struck. His voice would not come up out of his chest and the dizziness swamped his mind, and, in fever, he was once again in Pastiville, the nearest planet with an oxygen atmosphere.

* * * *

Hertha followed him up the alley, out into the cheap glitter of Windopole Avenue, a rutted, smelly street which was the center of the port-workers' section. She followed him across Windopole, up Venus, across Nineshime. He turned into the Lexo Building, which had become shabby since he had seen it last, when it had been freshly painted. She did not follow him inside, and he breathed a sigh of relief and tried to put her out of his mind as he walked up the stairs to the room 17B.

After a moment's hesitation, his heart knocking with pleasant anticipation, he pressed the buzzer.

"Come in."

He found the knob, twisted open the door, entered.

"Why Jimmy!" the girl said in what seemed to be surprise and heavy delight. She crossed to him quickly and offered her lips to be kissed. "It's good to see you!"

He took half a step backward, trying to keep the shock out of his face.

"Oh, it's so good to see you, Jimmy! Sit down. Tell me all about it, about everything. Did you make loads and loads of money? When did you get back? How's the lig fever?"

He sat down, scarcely listening, studying the apartment, feeling vaguely ill. She was chattering, he realized, to overcome her embarrassment.

"The books you ordered came. I've got them right here. They're all there but some poetry or other. There was a letter about that, but the people just said they didn't have it in stock. I opened it to see if it required an answer. Just a sec. I'll get them for you." She left the room with quick, nervous strides.

The apartment had been redone since he had seen it. There were now expensive drapes at the windows, imported from somewhere; a genuine Earth tapestry hung above the door. Plump silken pillows scattered on

the floor and a late model phono-general in the corner, with a gleaming cabinet and record spool accessory box.

She came back with the books, neatly done up in a bundle.

"I guess you still read as much as ever? Don said you always were a great reader."

Uncomfortably, he stood up.

She put the books on a low serving table, moistened her lips to make them glistening red. "Sit _down_, Jimmy!"

He still stood.

"_Jimmy!_" she said in mock anger. "Sit down! Goodness, it's good to have a fellow Earthman to talk to. I was so busy when you came by the other time, we scarcely had a _minute_ to talk. I'd just got here, you remember.... Well, I'm settled now, so we'll just have to have a nice, long talk."

He shifted on his feet.

"I don't suppose you've heard from Don?" Her voice was strained, almost desperate. "Isn't it the oddest thing, him knowing you and me, and both of us right here?"

"He told me to write how you were getting along?"

"... Oh."

He smiled without humor and felt like an old man. He wanted to explain how he had looked forward to seeing a person from his own planet again. Now he wanted to remind her of the girl he remembered: When she had just arrived, still unpacking, eager to start as a junior secretary for the League.

"Thank you for letting me send the books here," he said. The sickness was heavy in the pit of his stomach, and suddenly he was hard and bitter. He quoted softly:

"The world forsaken,
And out of mind
Honor and labor,
We shall not find
The stars unkind."

"Old poetry? I guess you really do read a--" Then understanding made her eyes wince. "That wasn't intended to be very complimentary, was it, Jimmy?"

Her name was no longer Doris; it was any of a thousand, and her perfume, heavy in his nostrils, was not her perfume or any individual's. She was there before him; she was real. But along with her were a thousand names and a thousand scents. There was the painful nostalgia of recognizing a strange room.

Awkwardly he said, "I really must go. I'd like to have a long talk, but--"

Her lips parting in sudden artificiality, she crossed to him, reached for his hand with her own.

In his mind was the heavy futility of repeating the same thing senselessly until it lost all meaning.

"I apologize about the poem," he said, because he knew that it was not his place to speak of it.

"That's all right," she said with hollow cheerfulness. Her mouth jerked and her eyes darkened. "Please don't go yet."

The palms of his hands were moist. He looked around the apartment again, and he did not want to ask, to bring it out in cruel words. It was not the sort of thing one asked.

"I really must go," he repeated levelly.

She put her hands on his shoulders. "Please...."

And then he saw that she intended to bribe him in the only way she knew how, and he said, "Don't worry, I won't tell Don."

He saw relief on her face, and then he was out of the apartment, shaken. He felt as if he had been kicked in the stomach, and he was sickened and his hand trembled. He wanted to talk to someone and try to explain it.

Hertha was waiting when he came out to the street.

* * * * *

The fever passed; control of his body returned.

"For you?" Hertha asked.

He half propped himself up on the cot. He waved his hand weakly. "Those dead plants. You must throw them out and bring in more."

He listened tensely, imagining that he could hear the precious oxygen

hiss in from the emergency tank to freshen and revitalize the dead air. Halfway down on the dial. Not enough for ten days, even for one person, unless the air was replenished by bringing in plants.

"Hertha, we've got to purify this air. Now listen. Listen carefully, Hertha. You've seen me dig up those plants on the outside?"

"Yes, I watch when you go out. I always watch, Jimmy."

"Good. You've got to do the same thing. You've got to go out and dig up some plants. You've got to bring them in here and plant them the way I did. You know which ones they are?"

"Yes," she said.

He closed his eyes, trying to think of a way to make her see how vital a thing a tiny plant could be. The complex chemistry of it bubbled to the surface of his mind. He wanted to tell her why the plants died in the artificial human atmosphere and had to be replaced every week or so. He wanted to tell her, but he was growing weaker.

"They purify the air by releasing oxygen. You understand?"

She nodded her head dumbly.

"You must bring in a great many plants, Hertha. Remember that--a great many. Don't forget that. When you go outside, through the locks, we lose air. Air is very precious, so you must bring in a great many plants."

"Yes, Jimmy."

"And you must plant them as I did."

"Yes, Jimmy."

He began to talk faster, in a race with the growing fever.

"I've gathered most of the oxygenating plants around the hut. So you may have to go into the forest to get enough."

"The--the forest?"

"You must, Hertha! You must!"

Her mouth twisted as if she were ready to cry. "For you. Yes, for you I will go into the forest."

The fever came back. His mind wandered away.

* * * *

He was walking in the open air. He walked from Nineshime to Venus, down Venus to Windopole, up Windopole to "The Grand Eagle and Barrel." He went in. Hertha came with him and sat down by his side at the bar.

The bartender looked at him oddly. "She with you, Mac?"

He turned to look at her; her dumb, brown eyes met his. He wanted to snarl: "Get the hell away! Leave me alone!" But he choked back the words. It was not Hertha he was angry with. She had done him no injury. She had merely followed him, perhaps because she knew of nothing else to do; perhaps because of temporary gratitude for the coins; perhaps in hope that he would buy her a drink. When the anger passed, he felt sorry for her again.

He said, "Want a drink?"

She shook her head without changing expression.

He looked at her and shrugged and thought that after a while she would get tired and go away. He ordered, and the bartender brought a bottle and one glass.

Hertha continued to stare at him; he tried to ignore her.

He drank. He thought it would get easier to ignore her as the level of the bottle fell. It didn't. He drank some more. It grew late.

"I gotta explain," he said, the liquor swirling in his mind.

She waited, cow-eyed.

"Ernest Dowson. Man's name. He wrote a poem--_Beata Solitudo_. I wanna explain this. Man lived long, long, long, long time ago. You listenin'? Okay. That's good. That's fine. He said--it's ver' importan' you should unnerstan' this--he said how you put honor and labor out of your mind when you ... you're out here. What he meant, it's ... it's ... you see.... Now I gotta make you see all this. So you listen real close while I tell it to you. There was a man named...."

He wanted to explain how the frontier does things to people. He wanted to explain how society is a tight little box that keeps everything locked up and hidden, but how society breaks down and becomes fluid in the stars, and how people explode and forget what they learned in civilization, and how everything is unstable.

"This man, his name's--" he said.

He wanted to explain how the harsh elements and brute nature and space,

the God-awful emptiness and indifference and the sense of aloneness and selfishness and....

There were a thousand things he wanted to tell her. They were all the things he had thought about as he followed the frontier. If he could get it all down right, he could make her see why he had to follow the frontier as long as there was anything left inside of him.

Maybe the rest of the people out here were that way, too. Maybe he had seen it in Doris' eyes tonight. Maybe that was why society broke down in the stars and civilization came only when men and women like him were gone.

He did not want to know how the rest felt. He did not know whether it would be more terrifying to learn that he was alone, or that he was not alone.

But just for tonight, he could tell the alien creature beside him. It would be safe to tell her--if the idea had not rusted inside of him so long that there were no longer any words to fit it.

But first he had to make her see his home planet and the great cities and the landscaped valleys and the majestic mountains and the people. He had to make her see the vast sweep of the explorers who first carried the race to a million planets, who devised faster-than-light ships and metals to make the ships out of, metals to hold their forms in the crucible beyond normal space. He had to make her see the colonists who tied all the world together with spans of steel commerce and then moved on in ever-widening circles. He wanted to give her the whole picture.

Then he wanted to explain the surge, the restlessness of the men at the frontier. Different men, he thought; from the womb of civilization, but unlike their brothers. The men who pushed out and out. Searching, always searching. He was afraid to find out if their reasons were the same as his. For himself, he had seen a thousand planets and a thousand new life-forms. But it was not enough. There were the vast, blank, empty, indifferent reaches of space beyond him, and that was what drove him on.

This he wanted to say to Hertha: No matter how far you go, the thing that gets you is that there's nothing that cares; no matter how far, the thing is that nothing cares; the thing is that nothing cares. It gets you. And you have to go on because some day, somewhere, there may be--something.

But he lost the trend of his thoughts completely, and he had another drink.

"Decent people come out here...."

What was he going to say about decent people?

"Stupid!" he cried, slapping her in the face.

She rubbed her cheek. "Stupid?"

He wanted to cry, for he had not known that he was brutal. "Can't you see?" he screamed, and it was necessary to explain it to her; and then it was not necessary. "You're like the awful, indifferent, mindless blackness of space, unreasoning!"

"Unreasoning," she repeated carefully.

"You're _Hertha_!"

"I'm Hertha," she said.

* * * * *

The period of calmness that returned after the fever was crystal and lucid, preceding, he knew, a severe, prolonged seizure.

"I'm afraid," she told him, shivering, "but I will go."

He watched her get into the light surface suit, clamp down the helmet with trembling hands. He was shaking with nervousness as she hesitated at the lock. Then she pulled it open. It clicked behind her. He heard the brief hiss of the oxygen replacing the air that had whooshed out.

And he felt sorry for her, alone, terrified, on the scaly, hard surface of the tiny satellite. He closed his eyes, pictured her walking past his strip mine, past the gleaming heap of minerals ready for the transport.

He felt tears in his eyes and yet he could not entirely explain his feelings toward her--half fear, sometimes half affection. But more important than that: Why was she with him? What were her feelings? Had some sense of gratitude made her come? Affection?

He could not understand her. At times she seemed beyond all understanding. Her responses were mindless, almost mechanical, and that frightened him.

He remembered her dumb, apologetic caresses and her pathetically clumsy tenderness--or reflex; he could never be sure--and her eager yet reluctant hands and the always slightly hurt, slightly accusing look in her eyes, as if at every instant she was ready for a stinging blow, and her great sighs, muted as if fearing to be heard and....

He was drunk, screaming meaninglessly, and the bartender threw him out. The pavement cut his face. When he awoke, it was morning and he was in a strange room and she was in bed beside him.

She said, "I am Hertha. I brought you home. I will go with you."

The paralysis set in. He could not move. The tears froze on his cheeks, and he lay inert, thinking of her almost mindlessly fighting for his life in the alien outside.

Then she was back in the hut. So soon?

She looked at him, smiled through the transparent helmet at him. He could hear the precious oxygen hiss in to compensate for the air that had been lost when she entered.

He could see her eyes. They were proud. Relieved, too, as if she had been afraid he would be gone when she returned. He felt she had hurried back to be sure that he was still there.

She knelt by the flower bed and, without removing her suit, she held up the plant proudly. He could see the hard-packed dirt in the roots. Fascinated, he watched her scrape a planting hole. He watched her set the plant delicately and pat the soil with care.

Then she stood up.

He tried to move, to cry out. He could not.

He watched her until she went out of the range of his fixed eyes. She was going to the airlock again.

After a moment he heard the familiar hiss of oxygen.

She was going to get a great number of plants.

But one at a time.